



1 Peter 5:12-14

Where Are You Standing?

12 By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.

13 She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son.

14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The verses that we have just read form the close of Peter's first letter to the churches dispersed throughout Asia Minor. This is the point at which the Apostle would take the pen from the Amuensis, the secretary who was transcribing what he was dictating and write a closing greeting in his own hand. The closings to letters of the New Testament usually contain four different elements:

1) Greetings from the Apostle and the Christians in the place where he was writing from – there's a lot of so-and-so whom you remember says hello as well, in these. In modern letters we tend to put our greetings at the front of the letter, but in ancient letters the greetings tended to come at the end.

2) A statement on the bearer of the letter – I'm sending this with so and so, testifying that he was a good brother and that they should hear him and treat him well.

3) A statement regarding the purpose of the letter – Why did he write all this to them?

4) A Blessing or benediction

Now, for us, the most important parts are going to be 3 and 4, the purpose and the blessing of the letter. But I do want to spend some time talking about the names and details in this closing, because they too teach some important things.

First *Silvanus* – Silvanus is referred to by Luke in Acts using the shorter form of his name "Silas." This is the same fellow who helped Paul evangelize Asia and plant churches. Kid's you may remember that he was the one praying and singing with Paul in the Philippian jail in Acts 16. Paul refers to Silvanus as his colaborer and fellow preacher along with Timothy in 2 Cor. And 1 and 2 Thess.

By the time Peter is writing though, Paul has probably already been imprisoned after his last journey to Jerusalem and now Sylvanus is working with Peter. Peter says that he has written *by* Silvanus, which probably means that Silvanus was both the secretary who wrote for Peter as well as the bearer of the letter. You have to remember that at this point in time there was no just going down to the corner and popping this in the mail. If you wanted someone to get your letter you had to give it to someone who would carry it to the people you wanted to read it. As most of you know, Eric Newsom is now helping out around the office and I'm fairly sure that Eric is probably glad that times have changed considerably since then, and that now when I hand him a letter for the PCA administration in Atlanta I'm not expecting him to get it there himself.

Peter calls Silvanus a faithful brother, in essence saying I vouch for this man, he is a faithful brother, if you'd trust my word, trust his we are preaching the same thing.

Second, Peter also sends greetings from She who is in Babylon in verse 13. Now by Babylon, he doesn't mean that he is writing from the ancient city in Mesopotamia now in modern day Iraq. The Jewish community had left there by the time Peter was writing and it was already in decline. 50 years later the city would be a ghost town. No Peter is using the name "Babylon" symbolically to refer to Rome, something that is obviously also done by John in the book of Revelation. Babylon is a name implying captivity, worldliness, and persecution. And those factors will be important when we consider his reason for writing and his blessing in a little while. She who is in Babylon is not his wife, as though Peter would have referred to her in the third person, like the way Rumpole of the Bailey referred to his wife as "*she who must be obeyed.*" No, she is the bride of Christ, the Ekklesia, the church.

Peter also, mentions "Mark my Son" this is John Mark the cousin of Barnabas who also worked with Paul and is mentioned in Acts and several of his letters. He is also the author of the gospel according to Mark. Peter had a long connection with Mark and his family, in fact when Peter is miraculously released by an angel from Herod's prison in Acts 12 it is at John Mark's house where they are praying for his release that Peter and ends up standing at the door while Rhoda runs to tell everyone without letting him in. Papias who was a first century Christian reports that Mark recorded in his gospel the facts that were related to him by Peter. So in one sense Mark is Peter's gospel. Mark was in essence, Peter's Timothy his son in the faith, a weak and sometimes wavering man whom he mentored and who became immensely profitable to God and His Church.

I hope you see in all this the connectionalism in the early church. Today every church vigorously asserts its own independence, and lack of denominational connection, no one has any control over us! But at this time all the churches were organically connected, and although they were divided into individual congregations and groups of congregations in various cities, they still thought of themselves as part of the same body, following the same doctrine, preaching the same Gospel. These men trusted one another and worked together, and even though they might have disagreements they didn't split the church, they worked to resolve them, they held assemblies like the Jerusalem assembly to resolve theological disagreements, they even worked to resolve personal disagreements. So while Paul may have been angry with Mark for a time for abandoning he and Barnabas in their first missionary journey, by the end of his ministry in 2 Tim. He is writing: "*Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.*"

Well having discussed the details, let's look at the purpose of this letter. Peter hasn't written to teach them the gospel for the first time, or teach them new doctrines, he has written to exhort or encourage Christians to stand fast in the faith, testifying to them again that the gospel that they heard and believed is not a collection cunningly contrived fables, but the truth. That the gospel really is God's gracious way of saving sinners, and Peter as an eyewitness to the facts of Christ's ministry was eminently qualified to say that.

Now Brothers and Sister, my calling and the calling of every preacher, and what I strive to do whenever I preach is to quote Alexander Nisbet "*to make offer to sinners of the rich and free grace of God for pardoning, sanctifying, and saving of them, to stir them up to embrace that offer*" but once by God's sovereign grace someone has done that, my job is by no means over. No matter how

difficult the labor and delivery actually was, birth is not the end of a parents responsibilities, it is just the beginning, now those parents have to raise that child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and that process makes birth look easy by comparison. So too for a gospel preacher, once someone has believed the gospel that is the beginning of their walk, and now the ambassador of Christ has to see that the new believer grows in grace and the knowledge of the Lord and that they advance in holiness and sanctification, that they keep running the race!

In a sense one of the most important jobs of the Pastor is to be like the coach who not only trains the runner, but once he is running he stands on the side line and shouts encouragement, saying “go on you are running well, the finish line is just over there, don’t look back, don’t give up!”

Because, never forget that the Christian has fierce enemies and many temptations to run poorly or just to stop running. Sometimes even strong Christians wake up in the morning asking themselves is this Gospel I believed really true? One of the times when that is most likely to happen is in times of suffering, times of persecution. I don’t think that it is any coincidence that the same John the Baptist who confidently pointed to Jesus and said to his followers, “***Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!***” after he had been thrown into prison sent messengers to Christ to ask “***Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?***” And Christ has to send Him an encouraging answer to build up his wavering faith.

Now Peter knows that these Christians he’s writing to are going to have their own faith tested and tried by terrible persecution, so he writes to encourage them not to give up, that this suffering is light, that it is only for a time, that there is blessing in it from God. God is not absent from their suffering but values it, He uses it to mold us, and He rewards it.

His use *The Church in Babylon* would be a reminder again that their brothers in Rome also suffer for the gospel and that they are all Sojourners here on earth, while we are here we are in a real exiles, brothers and sisters, suffering here on earth is good that we not love this world to much because this is not our home. We are people traveling the king’s highway to our real home which is Heaven.

If before we set out on an ocean voyage we could receive absolute assurance from an absolutely trustworthy source that we will reach our final destination safely, then no matter what storms came our way, their power over us would be broken, they could never turn us back. That is what Peter is trying to persuade Christians of, you WILL absolutely reach your destination because God in his grace is the one who carries you through, and he never starts anything he doesn’t finish.

Finally in verse 14 Peter says two things: First Greet one another with a kiss of love: Now in the ancient near east the common greeting between friends was not a handshake, it was a kiss on the lips. That is how the ancient church greeted one another, gradually the practice fell away, until it became a symbolic kiss done in the celebration of the mass. But brothers and sisters, while I am not saying we have to kiss each other on greeting, we must TRULY love one another.

In some protestant churches they took that moment in the liturgy of the mass where the kiss occurs and imported it as “passing the peace” that is when suddenly the person who has been ignoring you for 30 minute turns to you and shakes your hand and asks you your name. The first time this happened to me, it freaked me out. Here we were ignored by the congregation until we had an enforced moment of phoney baloney friendship. Brothers our greetings and our love should be constant and real, that is one of the many reasons I don’t stand at the door and force you to shake my hand and tell me the sermon you heard none of because you were fighting a rebellious child was “really good.”

Second he offers his blessing of Peace. But notice what he says it is ***“Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus”***

This is Shalom – true Peace with man and God

This is not a peace that is merely the absence of conflict

Neither is it a peace made up of the circumstances of life

This is a peace that comes by being reconciled to God through faith in Christ.

This is a peace that can only come to those that are in Christ Jesus.

“Their Good life-style and future hope, and their present peace are all due to their relationship with Christ and their identification with him. Their peace then is not the peace of this world, but the blessings of the coming age and its ruler, experienced in his “family” in the foretastes of this life.” – Peter Davids

It is a peace that means you can be persecuted, and have the circumstances of your life be totally upside-down, loved ones far away, finances in jeopardy, job prospects dim and yet you still have the peace that comes from knowing that you are Christ’s beloved and that HE will never leave you or forsake you.

Do you have this peace, or are you dependent upon your circumstances? The absence or presence of that peace really will help to tell you where you really stand?